

# What Hiring Managers Look for in a Portfolio

The Portfolio is an essential and invaluable part of the overall identity for any designer. It is the full realization of “a picture is worth a thousand words”. It is equal parts history and future, past success and potential, and often equal parts frustration and satiation.

Creating a portfolio, much like putting together a resume, is the amalgamation of both art and science with the goal of telling your story with enough flair to cut through the noise. To help strike that balance, DBI has produced this paper to provide you with a roadmap for a professional portfolio that will get you noticed by hiring managers. It is broken into three different sections. First, what a hiring manager, or anyone reviewing your portfolio, is looking for. Second, we will talk about creating and maintaining a modern portfolio. Portfolios are not static - they are living, growing documents and must be tended to regularly. Last, we will talk about how to get your portfolio to stand out by showing off all of your hard work.

### WHAT HIRING MANAGERS LOOK FOR IN A PORTFOLIO

To the Architect, Graphic Designer, Interior Designer or Creative, the portfolio is the expression of their design voice, the visual representation of their past work and a window into their design aesthetic and point of view. It is also the best way to showcase design work and market design skills to potential employers.

But what do hiring managers want to see in a portfolio? What grabs their attention and motivates them to reach out for an interview? Below are tried and trusted ways to tweak your portfolio into a powerful tool that gets noticed by hiring managers.



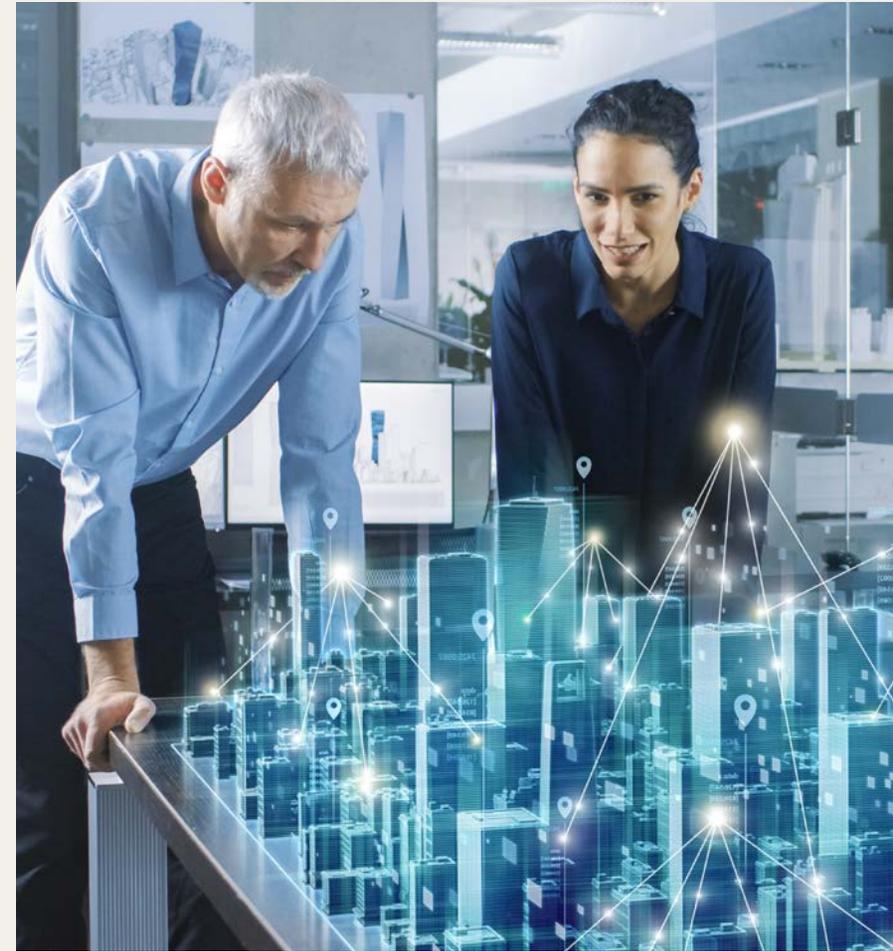
## **HIRING MANAGERS LOOK AT PORTFOLIOS HOLISTICALLY**

Portfolios tell the designer's story. As such, the portfolio should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. The one thing anyone reviewing a portfolio looks for is to see if it tells the story of professional development. Next, they are looking for consistency in presentation.

Another way to make a professional impact and tell a consistent and interesting story is to always use the same fonts, borders and frames throughout the portfolio. Consistency shows the hiring manager professionalism, thoughtfulness and an understanding of how to look at a project holistically. Finally, reviewing your portfolio for spelling and grammatical errors is essential as it shows an attention to detail that hiring managers are looking for in candidates.

## **HIRING MANAGERS WANT TO SEE A RANGE OF DESIGN SKILLS**

When a firm sets out to hire someone, they are evaluating how a new employee will work in their organization on the first day as well as the fifth year. To help outline this to a hiring manager, the portfolio must show a range of design skills. Each portfolio should showcase three design elements: hand sketches, process documentation and photos of the finished projects. Now, each person has a different strength and focus so it is important to move the predominate skill set to the forefront of the portfolio but address all three areas.



# Hand Sketching

The term hand sketching is used a lot in the design industry but in reality, many designers do not technically sketch with pencil and paper anymore. For the purpose of this paper hand sketching refers to the work in progress. These could be first doodles or sketches from a design charette, working draft images or trail balloons. It is the story of the process you went through to get to the final product.

Hand Sketches are important because it shows a hiring manager the designer's ability to quickly draw a concept in the moment. It is also a great way to get design concepts across to a client in real time. Giving the client a glimpse of what a final project might look like could save you from back and forth design changes later. Often a great hand sketched elevation is what is needed to convince a client and win a project. Even if the majority of your hand sketches are from school or drawn specifically for the portfolio, it is important to have hand sketches as part of your portfolio.

Portfolios must also showcase process development skill. This is the ability to work, skillfully, in your industries software. The best way to do this is to have some of your design documents in your portfolio. This could be 3-D renderings, concept studies in Revit, or the progress of an idea through Adobe. Creative ways to show this work or to tell a project story with the images, working from concept to finish building, packaging, or user interface. Another creative way to showcase this process is to collage some of the work with brief sentences about the progression.

The last thing every portfolio must have is the finished work. Most firms have policies that allow designers to request finished work samples for portfolios. Simply check with Human Resources to find out how to acquire the images. Most firms will accommodate requests even if the work is from a past firm. Having final product images will show the hiring manager's how concepts translated into the real world, a critical aspect of standing out.



## Hiring managers want to see **personality**

Unlike a resume, the portfolio is an expression of personality as much as it is an expression of skill. This is one of the great advantages of a strong portfolio and one of the best ways to stand out from the crowd.

There is really no right or wrong way to personalize the portfolio. Have fun with it. Maybe Japanese architecture is an influence. Perhaps the Memphis Style is a graphic foundation. Let these influences be a clear part of your portfolio to help the hiring manager, or anyone who views your portfolio, understand the point of view.

As with anything, these are not hard and fast rules nor are these all that is needed to make a great portfolio. This is just a small list of things that a hiring manager looks for as they review portfolios. The most important thing to remember when developing the portfolio is that it has to have a representation of skill set. It has to be exciting, and it has to be fun.



## Creating and Maintaining a Modern Design Portfolio

The job market for Architecture, Interior Design, and Graphic Design talent is heating up. Because of the number of candidates looking, firms across the globe are hiring and have set a very high bar for the people they make an offer to. For better or for worse, much of those hiring decisions are made on the strength of the portfolio. It is no exaggeration that the portfolio can make or break a job search.

Over time portfolios should evolve. If the portfolio is not updated and maintained, it can quickly look outdated. The portfolio is more than your history, it is your professional story. No longer does it sit in a dusty binder, but today's portfolio lives online, on your phone, and in paper. It is also not a stagnate document. Truly exceptional portfolios are living records of your work that should change and update to reflect the designer as they grow.

To keep a portfolio up to date there are a few keys concepts to keep in mind if you want to get your portfolio noticed and to build and maintain a modern, dynamic portfolio.



## Who is looking at your portfolio?

In today's reality, everyone is looking at your portfolio. It is the designer's business card. Your portfolio is not just what you did, but how you did it. It is what you are doing, and how you are doing it. Everyone, from colleagues to hiring managers, is looking for the story of your design.

This document needs to mirror your own evolution as a designer. It needs to be grounded in your inspirations and aspire to your own personal design goals. It needs to tell everyone, in a clear voice, where you have been, who you are and where you are going.



### THE STRUCTURE OF THE PORTFOLIO

While the portfolio should be created in your own voice, there are a few common factors that help others understand your design story.

#### **Recent, professional images of work you were involved in.**

The important thing to remember when adding images to your portfolio is to also write about the project. Describe the project, the team that worked on it, the client, and most importantly, your role on the project.

#### **Hand sketching, schematic renderings, working document.**

This is about sharing your design process. How do you work? How did that process influence the work you have created? Doing this will highlight your creative process in a way that helps to tell your story. Combining your sketching with the final product images gives everyone a clear understanding of how you approach a design problem and solve it.

#### **Show your personality.**

This may be the most important aspect of your portfolio. Ensure that the portfolio is infused with who you are, your passions and interests. Hiring managers and firm leaders don't hire on skill alone, but personality fit. Showing your personality in a professional manner is critical.

#### **Verbiage and documentation.**

One effective method to personalize the portfolio is to add quotes and/or verbiage to the document to give the reviewer context for what they are looking at. A quote from a favorite architect or designer is one way to showcase design influencers. It is also appropriate to use quotes from teachers or managers in the portfolio. This will add depth and work as a quasi-reference. A concise and thoughtful quote about the work presented in the portfolio from a manager or client can really help the portfolio stand out.



# When should you update your portfolio?

The brief answer is always and often. Not only should you add to your portfolio after each project, it is important to save the hand sketches and other peripheral drawings that help to tell the story of the projects. It is impossible to reach back through time and remember all the images you created; those sketches are gone.



## HOW TO MAKE YOUR PORTFOLIO STAND OUT

Now that you understand the structure of a portfolio, how can you make yours stand out among all the others? Below are a few ideas that DBI has seen used to great effect.

### Story boards

Story boards are a great way to show your work's progression from inspiration to idea and on to sketches and finished product.

### Quotes

Quotes can be impactful if done right. A comment from a client on the work you have done or a note from a principal outlining your role on a project can be invaluable when a new firm is reviewing your portfolio. Quotes that are not relevant, on the other hand, will sink you fast.

### Process

Different than a story board, this speaks to how you work. Collaboration, delegation, independent thinking. Being able to visually demonstrate these abilities will make you really stand out from the rest.

### Inspirations

Who is your favorite architect? What is your favorite interior space? What do you do that feeds your creativity? The answers to these questions give anyone viewing your portfolio insight into who you are, as a designer and a person.

In the end, your portfolio is about you. Regardless of what is included, how it looks, or where it lives, it has to be an honest representation of you and your work. This honesty and insight into you is the true purpose of the portfolio.

# 4 Free Websites to Get Your Portfolio Online

Having an online architecture or design portfolio is a must in today's fast-moving, digital world. It is a critical tool in being able to attract potential employers in a tight job market, an excellent way to stay organized as you add new projects to your resume, and a great way to be able to reflect on your body of work and look for ways to grow. The bottom line is, whether you are a seasoned design veteran or a fresh-out-of-architecture-school newbie, having an online portfolio that you can easily keep updated and leverage throughout your professional journey is invaluable.

If you aren't interested in learning how to build your own website or you simply don't have the time, there are several options out there to help you get your portfolio online in a format that will be both easy to share and keep it looking great. Here are 4 of the top portfolio hosting sites for architecture and design professionals on the web. All of them are free and all of them are quite easy to use.

## Archinect

Archinect was started by Paul Petrunia way back in 1997 to "establish a more connected community of architects, students, designers, and fans of the designed environment." It has grown a lot since then and has become a vibrant online hub for all things architecture and design. Aside from offering users a great way to feature their online portfolio and resume in their profile, Archinect boasts a useful collection of forums, news feeds, job postings, and more. The vast majority of the site is free (except for employers posting jobs), easy to use, and highly focused on the world of Architecture.

## Coroflot

Coroflot hosts one of the largest collections of professional design portfolios anywhere online featuring over 150,000 new projects published every month. Like Archinect, it was also launched in 1997, but the Coroflot community is home to a much wider scope of designers ranging from Architecture and Interior Design professionals to those from the world of Graphic Design, 3D Modeling, Industrial Design, Fashion, Gaming, and more. Beyond being a great place to host your portfolio, Coroflot also has an active job board and a user driven salary resource designed to help you get greater insights on the market when you are heading into a salary negotiation.

## Behance

Behance is a high quality and popular (over 60 million project views in the past 30 days alone) portfolio site brought to you by the team at Adobe. The site prides itself on being more than just a free tool for designers and artists to host an online portfolio by giving users tools to connect with the Adobe Creative Cloud, metrics on the traffic that visits their projects, job postings, and a lot more. One of the coolest features allows users that want to take their online portfolio to the next level, to power a customized premium website with their Behance profile using ProSite.

## Carbonmade

Carbonmade stands out among the selection of other portfolio hosting sites in this post because it gives users the ability to create an online portfolio that feels a lot more like a customized website rather than a profile page. As Carbonmade closes in on nearly a million profiles, it is continually rolling out new site design templates, tools, and options for users like their recent Dropbox integration and the ability to upload pdf files. If you are looking for an easy to use option that provides a higher level of customization, then Carbonmade is most certainly your jam when it comes to creating an online portfolio.

## About David Brown International

DBI's Architecture and Interior Design practice is focused exclusively in the global architecture and interior design industry. Supporting the industry since 2002, DBI understands the needs and challenges of hiring design talent and the rewards and motivations that drive design talent as they grow their career. We leverage this in-depth knowledge every day, every week, every month, year after year; becoming THE global leader in Architecture and Interior Design recruitment.

As we partner with design firms and corporations, we leverage this deep expertise. We create a strong connection that allows our recruiters to not only understand the skills needed in the right candidate, we understand the cultural match as well. DBI acts as our client's proxy in the marketplace. We are representing our clients with each interaction and we must get that right every time.

DBI knows that bringing on talent is equal parts industry knowledge, relationships, expertise, and timing. We use these elements to create a unique and highly targeted search strategy for our clients. We understand the business and markets demands on design firms. That is why we partner throughout the entire process, and after the candidate has started. We bring an expertise in recruiting and hiring that allows you to do what you do best, create, design, and manage.

At every level, talent matters. They help to grow a business and keep it competitive. The right hire must be made every time. DBI is the global expert in managing the process of hiring talent in the design industry.